

November 2024

Dear Parents, Carers, Governors, and Trustees,

It is my great privilege to introduce the 2023/2024 Principal's Report. This past academic year has been an extraordinary journey for our students, staff, and the wider community. Together, we have achieved incredible milestones, celebrated countless successes, and continued to foster an environment of inclusion, growth, and opportunity.

A Year of Remarkable Achievements

We have celebrated many 'firsts' with our students, from achievements in academics to personal milestones. Our community has been filled with experiences, opportunities, celebrations, friendships, and a strengthened psychological awareness - all underscored by a love of learning and the joy of simply playing and becoming the best versions of ourselves. Residential care, the school and our Sixth form received an Ofsted Outstanding judgement, and Boothroyd received a very positive first inspection. It was the 19th outstanding judgement for our residential care setting, and the first time our Sixth Form had faced Ofsted scrutiny. A testament to hard work, dedication, and excellence... Setting the tone for a year filled with ambition, excitement, and of course... A wholehearted commitment to continuous improvement.

Our attendance rates are outstanding: student attendance is at 96.7%, and our rate of persistent absence (below 90%) is impressively low, at under 7%, compared to a national average of 37.6% in special schools. Staff attendance is equally commendable at 95.51%, excluding long-term absences, which stand at 2.07%. This commitment reflects the dedication of our entire Foundation - students and staff alike.

Expanding the Foundation

In our pursuit of excellence, The Smith Foundation (comprising The William Henry Smith School & Sixth Form, The William Henry Smith College, and Boothroyd House) has undertaken a transformative year. We saw a 9% increase in staff and a 13% increase in school enrolment, and our college roll remains robust. As we await Charity Commission approval to consolidate our services under a unified banner, we anticipate a 2025 transition. Though this administrative change will not impact our children or families directly, it will enable future growth and reinforce the Foundation's mission and legacy. We also exited the West Yorkshire Pension Fund on favourable terms, successfully transferring employees to alternative schemes.

Our financial stability and carefully managed budgets empower us to provide exceptional support to both our students and staff, ensuring their needs are met effectively and sustainably. Our healthy financial reserves provide a solid foundation, allowing us to invest confidently in the ongoing development of our students, staff, and overall organisational goals and align with our responsibilities under our charitable conditions, ensuring we can sustainably fulfil our mission to support and enrich the lives of those in our community.

This year, we strengthened our senior leadership team with the appointments of Rachael Johnson, Vice Principal-Therapeutic Practice & Health and, in November, Sarah Kaler-Vice Principal-Finance, Business, and Operations. They join Karl Adamski, Damien Talbot, Leanne Clarke, Tom Gilbody, and Georgina Poole, forming an experienced and dynamic leadership team well-equipped to guide our organisation toward continued growth and success.

We are equally excited about the introduction of a multi-disciplinary team led by clinical leads. Their expertise across various specialisms is already driving high-quality practices and shaping strategies that integrate diverse professional perspectives, ensuring the best outcomes for our community.

Governance and Leadership

Our governance structure evolved this year, prioritising collaboration between senior leaders and shifting from committees to special interest groups to drive improvement and quality assurance. We bid farewell to our long-serving Chair of Governors, Roger Tilbrook, who stepped down to focus on his role as Chair of Trust, and welcomed Rezina Kelly, whose wealth of experience will be invaluable. Our heartfelt thanks go out to our Governors and Trustees, whose commitment continues to propel us forward and enable us to march forward with real purpose.

Staff Learning and Development: Building Knowledge and Skills for a Neurodiverse Community

This year's staff development initiatives have gone beyond skill-building—they've nurtured empathy, understanding, and a more responsive, inclusive approach. A significant focus was placed on relationships, communication, and language, all rooted in psychological awareness to foster a truly supportive environment. Our Foundation-wide training emphasized Neurodiversity in the Workplace, Creative Therapies, and Curiosity-Creating Space for Multiple Stories & Difference. Sessions on Neurodivergence and Sensory Processing, as well as Reframing Language for Neuro-affirming Outcomes, provided our teams with invaluable tools and perspectives.

Targeted sessions, such as Hypermobility and Neurodivergence, Pathological Demand Avoidance Dance Movement Psychotherapy Experiential, and Square Pegs, Round Hole, equipped our staff with the knowledge and skills to create a more inclusive space. A reminder that each of us has a role in celebrating difference and championing every child's right to an understanding, supportive learning experience.

The National Landscape

The landscape of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in England is currently shaped by significant challenges, reforms, and ongoing initiatives aimed at improving the provision and outcomes for children and young people. We know from our work locally, regionally and nationally that despite the legal framework, there are several ongoing challenges, including Local Authorities facing significant budgetary constraints, leading to difficulties in providing timely and adequate support and appropriate funding. We know that families experience long waiting times for assessments and securing EHCPs. In some cases, families have to resort to legal action to obtain the support their children need, reflecting systemic challenges.

Increasing attention is being paid to the mental health needs of SEND children, but many services are overwhelmed, and there is a lack of mental health support specifically tailored to these children's needs. Our work locally through our Specialist Provision Cluster (of which we are the Lead School) therefore is immensely important and beyond our doorstep we continue to reach 100 mainstream schools in Calderdale. More recently, we have developed an even closer link with our local special school partners, Highbury and Ravenscliffe, showcasing our farm, where their children, supported by our own student ambassadors, have thoroughly enjoyed feeding the animals and toasting marshmallows.

Our Students' Experience

Our newest children, 16 wonderfully excited, understandably nervous and curious, and not all at once I add, adorned our New Beginnings during the year. Our year 11's took on the challenge of qualifications, and awards, the Duke of Edinburgh, work experience and voluntary work... and made successful applications to colleges, to study a range of subjects, such as catering, art, hospitality, public services, sports, and preparation for adulthood. Our Sixth formers using their acquired skills, confidence and courage took on their fears, entering a new world full of new people, experiences, skills and promise. Christmas brought an abundance of joy and excitement. Our school was transformed into a winter wonderland. With Santa's Grotto, trips to Winter wonderland, and to pantomimes. The magic of the season came alive. The Festive Market was bustling with handmade crafts, mostly made by our children and their staff, using their creative, enterprise and business skills, accompanied by delicious treats, and holiday spirit.

In the realm of literacy, we celebrated the breath taking magic and wonder of reading on World Book Day. With students and staff transformed into their favourite characters, they brought stories to life, igniting imaginations, transporting us to new worlds. We found the most unique places to read our favourite books, and our children in New Beginnings and the Farmhouse headed off to the Pottery Spot to paint a book character, helping to explore texts. All a reminder of the power of books, the value of learning to read, the opening up of doors, and of possibilities, an inspiration to dream big.

Red Nose Day was another highlight, where laughter and empathy came together to help us understand the work of charities, of others and their troubles, and...the importance of generosity, helpfulness, goodwill and a celebration of difference. We celebrated the NSPCC Childhood Day, with a sea of green, and lots of resources to equip us with the knowledge and tools to help keep us safe. And our work with St Augustine's demonstrated the incredible compassion and initiative of our young people, who put together parcels of gifts and essentials, and walked, cycled, and ran the mile to contribute to a collective target of 24,901 miles-the circumference of the world. Our Umbrella Project encouraged our students to explore various forms of art and self-expression, culminating in a spectacular showcase underpinned by the strengths, diverse talents and indeed superpowers of our students, and of our workforce. A reminder that we all make a significant difference in the world.

The Easter Fayre was a delightful event, filled with games, activity and crafts, and the excitement of the appearance of our Easter Bunny. It was a time for our school community to come together, joined by our children's families, and visitors. There was chocolate and popcorn galore, and we were all treated with food from around the globe.

Another one of the many exciting educational experiences was our visit from Zoo Lab. The opportunity to get up close, scarily close, to various insects and animals, to learn about their habitats and behaviours, sparking our curiosity and a deeper appreciation for the natural world in all of us. The chess tournament was a testament to our students' strategic thinking and intellectual prowess. The intense matches and thoughtful moves showcased such dedication and analytical skills. There was silence and respect during the games, and handshakes of acknowledgement and player spirit.

A trip to the Concept theatre in Manchester was a spectacular experience for 12 of our students across the school and sixth form, and our college. They were joined by 24 other boys and girls from 11 schools across the UK, including visitors from Guernsey, picking up prestigious national awards for significant personal progress, across the fields of independence, citizenship, sport, innovation and creativity, and resilience.

Movement, physical activity, and outdoor learning are indeed benefits to our holistic well-being and emotional health too, and our boys have been actively involved in numerous sporting events, representing the school, and their local community teams. The Engage Football tournament once again provided a stage for our students to showcase their spectacular skills, and we even saw glimpses of Gareth Southgate. Our junior teams overflowed with excitement and brimmed with pride, supporting each other, and for some of them, it was their first competitive school game. For our older players, a trip to St George's Park (the home to all 23 England teams) was in store, a visit of a lifetime.

A focus on preparing our students for the future through our careers programme came to life. Engaging with professionals from various fields, our students explored different career paths, gaining insights and inspiration for what could be. With visits from sublime science, an art illustrator, personal trainer, robots/drones and construction, it opened their eyes to the riches of possibilities that lie ahead and insight into the steps needed to achieve dreams.

Quality of Life

In our commitment to fostering holistic development and wellbeing in our curriculum, we re-launched the Quality-of-Life programme. This initiative focused on teaching students' valuable life skills such as mindfulness, healthy habits, and emotional resilience, and for our year 11's an opportunity to polish their maths skills ready for summer examinations. One particular highlight was the introduction of the Science Club and an impressive rocket launch.

With residential care providing much needed wrap around support, there has been a strong focus on developing self-care, friendships, interests and independence, and importantly transferrable life skills to home environments. Trips and experiences to Comic Con, the National Space Centre, Blackpool pleasure beach, The Deep, Lego land, the Yorkshire Wildlife Park, cycling in the Dalby Forest, and visits to football matches and venues such as Elland Road, Huddersfield Town, Bradford, Burnley, Manchester United, with the highlights being to more prestigious ones, such as Wembley.

Finally, we concluded the year with well-deserved term-time holidays, not a tent or campfire in sight. Our boys and staff enjoyed memorable trips to various destinations, including the charming coastal town of Skegness, the stunning landscapes of Snowdonia-Wales, and the historical beauty of Greece and Alicante-Spain. Our Corbett boys stayed in the beautiful Corbett cottage in Hebden Bridge, where there were bountiful firsts, with bubble baths, and a first experience of being away from home. Our fishermen enjoyed the outdoors, proudly featuring in the Wharfedale news (I believe) for catching the biggest fish ever, and our London trip was a marvel, as students and staff explored iconic places and created unforgettable memories. With day visits to the Yorkshire Wildlife Park, Blackpool, kitty cat café, Great Yorkshire Show, Escape, Bolton Abbey, parks and experiences such as caving, cycling, crabbing and white-water rafting, we are a far cry from cooking on Trangia stoves and volunteering to walk the steep cliffs of Snowdon.

Achievements & Success

We know that achievement and success, in their broadest and most fulfilling sense, encompass personal growth, resilience, and the ability to overcome challenges. Our success is seen in fostering meaningful relationships, nurturing well-being, and creating environments where individuals feel valued, safe, included, and empowered to thrive. We know our work is about making a positive impact, whether through small yet significant change, or transformative milestones, all achievements are relevant to our children's own journeys.

This year we have seen some fantastic academic achievements too:

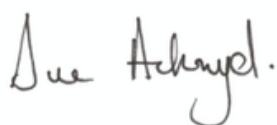
In School, a student achieved our first ever Grade 9 – equivalent to an A* in Computer Science. Other students have achieved a Grade 6, four Grade 5's, five Grade 4's as well as Grades 3-1 in English, Maths, Biology, Art, and Computer Science. A plethora of Distinctions and Merits were accrued in English-Spoken Language. Functional Skills in English & Maths has continued to advance with 10 passes this year. We have had 7 BTEC achievements in Business and Digital Media with 3 Distinctions and Entry Levels in Construction, Hospitality and Maths.

Our Specialist College has seen 2 students achieve A-Level History, GCSEs in English, Maths, Science, and Statistics with two Grade 5's. 1 student gained a 5 in Higher Maths and with 2 passes in Functional Skills- English and Maths, achievements in the Arts Awards, City & Guilds in Vehicle maintenance and in Welding, and 5 passes in Home Cooking Skills, as well as Entry Levels in Maths, progress has been staggering.

I am filled with immense pride and gratitude as I reflect on this year's achievements. Our students have demonstrated remarkable growth, both emotionally and socially, building their confidence and independence while blossoming into compassionate, curious, and courageous individuals. They have embraced every opportunity, faced challenges with resilience, and shown a deep empathy for others as they learn to explore, understand, and navigate the world around them.

To our incredible staff teams, thank you for your unwavering dedication, passion, and commitment. Your guidance and support have shaped the experiences and successes we celebrate today. To our parents, carers, governors, and trustees, your steadfast support, partnership, and belief in our shared mission have been invaluable.

Together, we continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our students.



Sue Ackroyd
CEO/Executive Principal

Executive Leadership	
Sue Ackroyd	Chief Executive Officer/Executive Principal
Senior Leadership Team	
Karl Adamski	Head of School
Damien Talbot	Deputy Principal-Residential & Pastoral Care/Designated Safeguarding Lead
Leanne Clarke	Deputy Principal-Further Education
Tom Gilbody	Vice Principal-Workforce Learning & Development
Georgina Poole	Vice Principal-Policy & Practice
Rachael Johnson	Vice Principal-Therapeutic Practice & Health
Sarah Kaler	Vice Principal-Business, Finance & Operations
Governors	
Rezina Kelly	Chair of Governors & Mental Health Governor
Heather Gibson	Vice Chair of Governors/ Residential Care & Safeguarding Governor/Chair of People Special Interest Group
Jeremy Conway	Chair of Environment, Premises & Resources Special Interest Group/ Careers Governor
Sue Ackroyd	CEO/Executive Principal
Kate Wilson	Chair of Children and Young Adults Special Interest Group/ Teaching & Learning Governor
Sophie Baxter	Further Education Governor
Hayley Ramshaw	Governor
Matthew Crowther	Parent Governor
Ben Merritt	Chair of Business & Partnerships Special Interest Group
Lauren Kershaw	Representative Governor (Non-Teaching Staff)
Barrie Campbell	Representative Governor (Teaching)
Vanessa Talbot	Governance Professional
Trustees	
Roger Tilbrook	Chair
Brendan Heneghan	Vice Chair & Treasurer
Andy Fairbairn	Trustee
Michelle Cuffe	Trustee
David Duncan	Trustee
Grant McIntosh	Trustee